

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

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Secretary Clinton Says U.S. Seeks Expanded Relationship with Vietnam .....	1
Remarks by Secretary Clinton, Minister Khiem of Vietnam .....	2
U.S. To Spend \$187 Million on Lower Mekong Initiative.....	3
Feed the Future: A U.S. Commitment Against Poverty and Hunger .....	4
U.S. Welcomes International Court Ruling on Kosovo's Independence .....	5
U.S. Relieves 100 Percent of Afghanistan's \$108 Million Debt.....	6
Americans with Disabilities Act Turns 20 .....	6

## Secretary Clinton Says U.S. Seeks Expanded Relationship with Vietnam

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration celebrates 15 years of expanding relations between the United States and Vietnam, and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says the administration is prepared to take the relationship “to the next level.” The secretary also urges Vietnamese officials to improve protection of human rights in their country.

Speaking in Hanoi, Vietnam, July 22 with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem, Clinton said the United States seeks to expand cooperation with Vietnam on issues such as trade and investment, health, education, good governance and human rights.

“We see this relationship not only as important on its own merits, but as part of a strategy aimed at enhancing American engagement in the Asia-Pacific and in particular Southeast Asia,” Clinton said.

Vietnam is also “an active partner” with the United States on civil nuclear power and counterproliferation efforts, she said.

Clinton said she and Vietnamese officials held candid discussions on areas of disagreement, including Vietnam’s human rights record.

With its dynamic population, Vietnam “is on the path to becoming a great nation with an unlimited potential,” she said. “And that is among the reasons we express concern about arrest and conviction of people for peaceful dissent, attacks on religious groups, and curbs on Internet freedom.”

The United States wants to work with Vietnam “in a spirit of cooperation and friendship” to support human rights reforms and the protection of basic rights and freedoms, she said.

The Obama administration also wants to promote economic progress in Vietnam and the country’s integration into the regional and global economy.

“As Vietnam embarks on labor and other reforms, the American businesses that are investing in Vietnam can provide expertise that will aid Vietnam’s economic and infrastructure development,” she said.

In remarks to U.S. Embassy employees in Hanoi, Clinton said U.S.-Vietnamese cooperation over the past 15 years has helped to overcome the legacy of the Vietnam War

and to restore trust between the American and Vietnamese people.

“Our cooperation has grown to encompass more than \$15 billion in bilateral annual trade, significant investment in health to fight HIV/AIDS, a 16-fold increase in the number of Vietnamese students studying at colleges and universities in the United States, and so much more,” Clinton said.

### FIVE-YEAR PLAN TO COOPERATE AGAINST HIV/AIDS

While in Hanoi, Clinton and Vietnam’s Minister of Justice Ha Hung Cuong signed a partnership creating a five-year cooperative response to HIV/AIDS in Vietnam.

According to a July 22 fact sheet released by the State Department, the partnership is part of the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and contributes to the program’s goals for global prevention, care and treatment.

“Central to the partnership framework are the goals of providing health and social services for most-at-risk populations, as well as strengthening the capacity and involvement of nongovernmental organizations, multilateral organizations, and the private sector,” according to the fact sheet.

PEPFAR is now the largest health program in Vietnam, and the United States has contributed more than \$400 million toward it, the fact sheet says.

Clinton signed the partnership after touring the Ngoc Lam Pagoda in Hanoi, which provides daycare for children who are living with HIV/AIDS or have been orphaned by it. The work at Ngoc Lam “proves that we have the power to respond effectively to this epidemic if we combine our knowledge of what works with our commitment and our compassion,” she said.

“What we see here is the kind of comprehensive response that this disease demands. The effects of AIDS are devastating and far-reaching. AIDS targets those who are often in the prime of their life, leaving children without parents, schools without teachers, hospitals without nurses, fields without farmers. It weakens economies, creates instability, and threatens long-term progress, and it causes families to lose loved ones and nations to lose their potential,” she said.

The United States is proud of its work in Vietnam through PEPFAR, the secretary said, but the Obama administration wants to expand beyond emergency measures to helping Vietnam to build an enduring health system.

The partnership “provides a road map” toward that goal, Clinton said, and the United States is committed to working with many sectors of Vietnamese society in the effort to create and carry out a comprehensive strategy to fight HIV/AIDS.

**Remarks by Secretary Clinton, Minister Khiem of Vietnam**

*Clinton says U.S. ready to take U.S.-Vietnam relationship to next level*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Office of the Spokesman

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton  
And Vietnam Deputy Prime Minister And Foreign  
Minister Pham Gia Khiem

Government Guest House  
Hanoi, Vietnam  
July 22, 2010

REMARKS

MODERATOR: (In Vietnamese.)

MINISTER KHIEM: (In Vietnamese.)

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you very much. It is a real pleasure for me to be back in Vietnam. And I have had the good fortune of observing the evolution of our relationship over the last 15 years ever since my husband, President Bill Clinton, took steps to normalize our relations. And we came on our first visit 10 years ago, which was a wonderful opportunity for me to see so much of the progress that was taking place. And now upon my return, I am looking forward to seeing even more.

My meetings today are very important to furthering our bilateral relationship. I think that Minister Khiem and I had candid and productive discussions on issues, as he said, ranging from trade and investment to health and education, to good governance, human rights, humanitarian and security issues. The Obama Administration is prepared to take the U.S.-Vietnam relationship to the next level on these issues and in new areas of cooperation. We see this relationship not only as important on its own merits, but as part of a strategy aimed at enhancing American engagement in the Asia Pacific and in particular Southeast Asia. We spoke about a range of challenges affecting regional security, including Burma, North Korea, territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and we welcome Vietnam’s constructive leadership and its excellent contributions to ASEAN, including its very important role as ASEAN chair. We also discussed our growing cooperation on civil nuclear

power and counter-proliferation efforts. Vietnam is an active partner in both areas.

In the past three months alone, Vietnam participated in President Obama’s Nuclear Security Summit, endorsed the global initiative to combat nuclear terrorism, and signed a memorandum of understanding with the United States on civil nuclear cooperation. Now, as with any country, we do not agree on everything. We have different experiences historically and culturally, but we had candid discussions about the issues we do view differently. The United States is committed to working with nations everywhere to help strengthen civil society as a fundamental ingredient of political, economic, and social progress. And Vietnam, with its extraordinary dynamic population, is on the path to becoming a great nation with an unlimited potential. And that is among the reasons we express concern about arrest and conviction of people for peaceful dissent, attacks on religious groups, and curbs on internet freedom.

We look to work in a spirit of cooperation and friendship to support efforts to pursue reforms and protect basic rights and freedoms. And we are particularly seeking to promote economic progress in Vietnam through broad-based growth built on Vietnam’s integration into the regional and global economy. We discussed our shared interest in expanding trade to create jobs in both countries. And I am very much supportive of Vietnam’s participation as a full member in the Trans-Pacific partnership. As Vietnam embarks on labor and other reforms, the American businesses that are investing in Vietnam can provide expertise that will aid Vietnam’s economic and infrastructure development.

Mr. Minister, we have a full and formidable agenda. But I believe our discussion today has helped lay the foundation for continued progress in our relationship. So again, let me thank you for the warm hospitality and the discussions that we’ve enjoyed on this auspicious occasion. Thank you, Minister.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) Thank you very much, Madam Secretary of State and with that, I would like to invite journalists to ask questions. We have only two questions for the journalists; one from Vietnam and one from the U.S. side. I invite VTV.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) May I introduce myself? I’m (inaudible) from the Television of Vietnam News. My question goes to Madam Secretary. What is the specific plan for the U.S. in cooperation with Vietnam to deal with the consequences of the wars in Vietnam?

SECRETARY CLINTON: The minister and I discussed the concern that both Vietnam and the United States have about Agent Orange and the consequences that it

produced in the people here. As you know, we have been working with Vietnam for about nine years to try to remedy the effects of Agent Orange and I told the minister that I would work to increase our cooperation and make even greater progress together.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) I invite the question from other journalist. Kim Ghattas from BBC, please.

QUESTION: Question to the Secretary first. I would like to ask you about Burma. You've expressed in the past concerns about the possibility that Burma is pursuing a nuclear program, that it has connections with North Korea on that front. I was wondering whether you were planning to present any evidence to members of ASEAN about your suspicions. And if you could tell us a little bit more about how you feel one year on or ten months on about how your efforts to engage Burma are actually going.

And to the minister, the Secretary said that she'd raised the issue of human rights and I was wondering what your response was.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, first with respect to problems in Burma and the impact not only on the people of that country, but on the neighbors as the outflow of refugees continues and the consequent instability because of that. I believe that the ASEAN nations correctly raised yesterday in their meeting their concerns about Burma and particularly the planned elections that Burma has said will be held, but without providing any details, even the date, raising questions about their commitment to such elections. I've also shared with the minister our concerns about the exporting by North Korea of military materiel and equipment to Burma. We know that a ship from North Korea recently delivered military equipment to Burma and we continue to be concerned by the reports that Burma may be seeking assistance from North Korea with regard to a nuclear program. So this is a matter that is of concern to ASEAN and it is of concern to the United States. And we will be discussing further ways in which we can cooperate to alter the actions of the government in Burma and encourage the leaders there to commit to reform and change and the betterment of their own people.

MODERATOR: (In Vietnamese.)

MINISTER KHIEM: (Via interpreter) With respect to human rights issue, we discussed this matter and this is, I think, that the difference between Vietnam and the U.S. I believe that the best way to have - enhance the mutual understanding is through promoting the dialogues. This is a very positive way and let me enter some more points that human rights have common values, but it also has its typical features, because it depends a lot on the cultural

and historical backgrounds. And it is very important to work closely together to share the views and (inaudible) together during our talk. I appreciated very much the opinions of President Obama regarding human rights. He said that there's no perfect way and each country should select their own ways, depending on the circumstances of the nation and the human rights values shouldn't be imposed from the outside. And I also value very much the observation from Madam Secretary at the university in 2009, that the human rights should (end of audio).

### **U.S. To Spend \$187 Million on Lower Mekong Initiative**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States will spend approximately \$187 million on projects to help four nations of the Lower Mekong River basin lessen the impact of climate change on water resources, food security and the health and livelihoods of nearly 60 million people.

During the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting July 22 in Hanoi, Vietnam, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton described growing cooperation between the United States and the Lower Mekong countries — Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. The spending plan for 2010 covers environmental issues, health concerns, and education and training, with the largest share going to health programs.

"Managing this resource and defending it against threats like climate change and infectious disease is a transnational challenge," Clinton told foreign ministers from the four countries at a private meeting on the sidelines of the ASEAN forum.

"Regional cooperation is essential to meeting that challenge, to preserving the ecological diversity and fertility of the Mekong region," she said. "We expect to continue similar levels of funding for the next two years."

More than 60 million people in four countries live in the Lower Mekong basin, which is an area of approximately 606,000 square kilometers in Southeast Asia. The Mekong River Commission has reported that climate change most likely will increase flooding throughout the region, which will affect food production and food security.

The Lower Mekong Initiative was launched in July 2009 at the ASEAN meeting in Phuket, Thailand. The program's objective is to promote the equitable, sustainable and cooperative development of the Mekong River, which is the world's largest inland fishery and a transboundary resource, says Timothy Hamlin, a research associate at the Washington-based Stimson Center's Southeast Asia



Project.

"The region is growing rapidly and faces many difficult decisions, especially pertaining to energy security," Hamlin said earlier this year. "The United States can provide technology and assistance to identify and promote regional solutions to the pressing demands of energy, food and human security."

The region faces the twin challenges of climate change and its impact on the river's ecosystems, and the impact of expanding populations, the Mekong River Commission says.

#### LOWER MEKONG ASSISTANCE

The United States will spend more than \$22 million this year on environmental programs in the Lower Mekong basin. One initiative will launch a three-year program to assist the four countries in developing cooperative strategies to address the impact of climate change.

A sister-river partnership was announced in May between the Mekong River Commission and the Mississippi River Commission in the United States. This partnership aims to improve the management of transboundary water resources. Work continues on the development of "Forecast Mekong," which is a modeling tool to show the impact of climate change and some other challenges to sustainable development in the river basin.

A two-year research program has been funded among universities in the Lower Mekong countries to study persistent organic pollutants in the basin, according to the U.S. State Department.

The largest share of the funding this year is \$147 million for health improvement programs that include a project targeting emerging pandemic threats in the region. The project will improve the identification of and response to new public health threats that originate in animals and aims to strengthen animal and human health systems to thwart outbreaks of infectious diseases.

A partnership is being launched to respond to infectious diseases by training health professionals and veterinarians to detect, track and contain outbreaks, and to establish a regional network to detect drug-resistant malaria. This builds on work launched at the Lower Mekong Conference on Transnational Infectious Disease Cooperation in June.

In addition to the other programs, U.S. assistance has provided HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention services to more than 2 million people across the Mekong region. This has contributed to a 50 percent reduction in the HIV/AIDS infection rate in Cambodia, facilitated the

provision of antiretroviral treatments in Vietnam and supported the largest clinical trial of a vaccine regimen for preventing HIV infection in Thailand, according to the State Department.

The initiative announced in Hanoi by Clinton includes \$18 million for education projects that include Internet availability for poor and rural areas and a program to bring regional professionals in education, environment and health to the United States to consult with professionals in their fields.

The initiative also supports English-language training through in-country scholarships that help professionals working in the Lower Mekong region to improve communications regionally and internationally.

#### **Feed the Future: A U.S. Commitment Against Poverty and Hunger**

*Officials, a scientist and a businessman tell Congress about the effort*

By Phillip Kurata  
Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. government, backed by U.S. scientists and corporations, is investing money and energy into reducing global hunger and poverty on a huge scale by 2015.

A State Department official overseeing the Feed the Future program, Patricia Haslach, told a congressional subcommittee July 20 that President Obama's pledge of \$3.5 billion at the G8 summit in L'Aquila, Italy, for agricultural development and food security through 2012 has attracted an additional \$18.5 billion pledged by other donors. Haslach said the U.S. government is holding them accountable for their commitments.

"In the year since global leaders at L'Aquila announced their renewed commitment to agricultural development and food security, we have made significant progress in holding donors accountable," Haslach said (PDF, 107KB). "Our ambassadors and embassy staff are reaching out regularly to encourage donors to fulfill their financial pledges."

The Feed the Future program is the Obama administration's vehicle to support the United Nations' goal of halving global poverty and hunger by 2015. Haslach said L'Aquila donors' pledges, totaling \$22 billion, can "increase significantly the incomes of at least 40 million people, including 13 million people living in extreme poverty on less than \$1.25 per day."

Haslach added that at the G20 summit in Pittsburgh in September 2009, President Obama pledged an additional \$475 million to establish the Global Agriculture and Food

Security Program. Private foundations and other governments have pledged or contributed more than \$400 million more for this program.

Haslach said the Feed the Future program is one element of a collective global effort involving governments, agricultural researchers, corporations and nonprofit foundations.

"This is not just a U.S. initiative, but rather a global initiative. Other countries recognize that it is in our collective interest to tackle the root causes of hunger and poverty," Haslach said.

Speaking at the same hearing with Haslach, William Garvelink of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) said Feed the Future is designed to create long-term development solutions, which go far beyond delivering food aid to relieve acute suffering. With regard to children's health in Africa, "we need to address the multiple dimensions of nutrition, spanning access to health services, women's control of incomes, and improving dietary quantity and quality, particularly for women and young children," Garvelink said (PDF, 85KB). Women farmers in Africa, who account for the majority of the small holder producers, are a big focus of the Feed the Future program, he said.

Garvelink, who has spent much of his career as a development officer in Africa, said the U.N. goal of halving global poverty and hunger by 2015 will be difficult to achieve. "Fifty-one percent of Africans live on less than \$1.25 per day. That is only 7 percent less than in 1990, and a very long way from the ... target of halving the proportion who live on \$1.25 per day," he said.

William Danforth, chairman of the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center in St. Louis, said scientific advances that are leading to more food being produced with less water, land and energy will benefit the program. Biotechnology has increased food availability and affordability, reduced use of pesticides, and preserved fertile topsoil through the use of no-till farming, he said.

He said, for example, the center has developed a more nutritious strain of cassava that has vastly higher levels of vitamin A, iron, zinc and protein and is more resistant to disease. Two hundred fifty million people in sub-Saharan Africa and 700 million people worldwide rely on cassava as a major source of calories. With funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Danforth said (PDF, 219KB) that the center and its partners in Africa are establishing cassava biotechnology laboratories in Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria. The center also is engaged in developing more nutritious varieties of sweet potatoes and peanuts.

Gerald Steiner, an executive of Monsanto Company, a biotechnology and agriculture corporation, said Monsanto is committed to supporting Feed the Future.

"We will do our part to help farmers double yields in our core crops — corn, cotton and soybeans — between 2000 and 2030, while producing each bushel or bale with one-third fewer resources such as land, water and energy. And, just as importantly, in doing so we will help farmers to earn more and improve the lives of their families and rural communities," Steiner told the subcommittee.

Steiner said Monsanto is donating what he called a "gem" from its biotechnology pipeline: a drought-resistant strain of white maize and know-how in accelerated plant breeding.

"We estimate it could result in new white maize varieties that yield between 20 percent and 35 percent more during moderate drought, enough to help keep hunger at bay," he said.

### **U.S. Welcomes International Court Ruling on Kosovo's Independence**

*Vice President Biden says U.S. support for Kosovo's sovereignty "unwavering"*

By Phillip Kurata  
Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. government has welcomed a ruling by the International Court of Justice that upholds the legality of Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence.

"The International Court of Justice today issued its advisory opinion and decisively agreed with the longstanding view of the United States that Kosovo's declaration of independence is in accordance with international law," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in a statement. "We call on all states to move beyond the issue of Kosovo's status and engage constructively in support of peace and stability in the Balkans, and we call on those states that have not yet done so to recognize Kosovo."

Vice President Joe Biden telephoned Serbian President Boris Tadić and discussed the ruling. He said the U.S. commitment to Kosovo's sovereignty and territorial integrity is "unwavering." He urged the Serbian government to work with the Kosovo government for the good of the people of the two countries and the region. The vice president told the Serbian leader that the United States and Serbia have strong, deep ties that enable them to work together on many issues. The vice president praised Serbia for its efforts to improve relations with Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and for its cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

After Kosovo declared independence from Serbia on February 17, 2008, Serbia challenged the legality of the declaration at the international court, based in The Hague, Netherlands. Kosovo fought a bloody secessionist struggle against Serbia in 1998 and 1999 and was under international administration for nearly a decade. So far, 69 U.N. countries have recognized Kosovo.

In Brussels, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the court's ruling will not affect the role of the 10,000-strong NATO peacekeeping force in Kosovo, known as KFOR.

Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi met with Biden in Washington July 21. The prime minister told Biden that the Kosovo government welcomes a constructive dialogue with Serbia to solve issues, such as missing persons, law enforcement and power management.

### **U.S. Relieves 100 Percent of Afghanistan's \$108 Million Debt**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States and Afghanistan signed an agreement to relieve 100 percent of Afghanistan's debt to the United States, which is part of a broader poverty-reduction program to improve the lives and livelihoods of the Afghan people, U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry said July 22 at a ceremony in Kabul.

"The agreement by our two governments to relieve Afghanistan of \$108 million worth of debt is an important element of the international community's broader effort to lift the debt burden inherited by the Afghan government," Eikenberry said with Finance Minister Omar Zakhilwal.

Zakhilwal said this debt relief is a significant step in Afghanistan's continuing progress. "This cancellation frees us from the burden of debt, allowing us to focus our resources on providing security and development to our people."

Afghanistan qualified for debt relief after making significant financial and regulatory overhauls, including strengthening its debt management program. Zakhilwal said the money saved will be redirected to government services such as education and health care.

In March the Paris Club, an informal group of the world's wealthiest nations, agreed to cancel the \$1.026 billion debt owed to it by Afghanistan. The Paris Club provides financial services such as debt restructuring, debt relief and debt cancellation to indebted countries.

The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and

creditor nations agreed at the start of the year to provide \$1.6 billion in debt relief to Afghanistan. The decision to cancel all these debts is seen as recognition of the progress Afghanistan has made in strengthening its economy, according to the international financial institutions.

The agreement announced July 22 is the culmination of a long process that began in 2007 when Afghanistan first began its debt relief program under the IMF/World Bank Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). Afghanistan's debt relief under HIPC is an important element of a broader international debt relief program that will ultimately forgive more than \$11 billion, or about 96 percent, of its external debt.

The country's reforms include "implementing the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, reforming the legal framework in the mining sector, and meeting the benchmarks laid out by Afghanistan's IMF program," Eikenberry said.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act Turns 20**

*Interview with State Department's Judith Heumann*  
By Louise Fenner  
Staff Writer

Washington — Twenty years ago, with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), disabled people in the United States won legal guarantees similar to those achieved in the civil rights movement a quarter of a century earlier.

The ADA "made a very big difference," says Judith Heumann, the State Department's special adviser on international disability rights.

"The value of this law was that it acknowledged that discrimination against disabled people in the United States was pervasive and systemic, and that the federal government needed to intervene," said Heumann, a lifelong advocate for the civil rights of people with disabilities.

The ADA was signed on July 26, 1990, by President George H.W. Bush. The law "has a very broad effect," Heumann said, "because it deals with the government and the private sector." The ADA substantially mirrors the protections of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibiting discrimination based on disability in the areas of employment; public services, such as education, medical facilities, transportation and voting booths; public accommodations and commercial facilities, such as stores, hotels, restaurants, recreation areas, theaters and arenas; and telecommunications.

Thanks to ADA, city buses and trains in the United States have lifts or ramps for wheelchairs, priority seating signs,

handrails, slip-resistant flooring and information stamped in Braille. Emergency call centers are equipped with telecommunications devices for the deaf (TDDs), and federally funded public service announcements have closed captioning. Sidewalks have curb cuts (ramps), and public restrooms have special stalls for persons in wheelchairs.

Heumann, who contracted polio at the age of 18 months, knows very well the barriers faced by disabled people. "I use a wheelchair, and for many years in my life there was no federal requirement that if a movie theater or a restaurant or a hotel were being built, or if any of these facilities were undergoing major renovations, they would have to be accessible," she said.

"Today the average person can see that when you go to movie theaters and shopping malls, grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations, they are accessible. Sometimes they store things in the wheelchair-accessible dressing rooms and they don't use them the right way, but basically the physical environment of the United States has dramatically changed."

Many Americans don't know the history of these universal design changes, Heumann said. "I think if you asked a younger person, they would presume that this was something that always was there — and in fact we know it wasn't always there." (Universal design — such as curb cuts, railings and cabinets with pull-out shelves — is usable and effective for everyone, not just people with disabilities.)

#### EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION ARE STILL CHALLENGES

Although the ADA prohibits discrimination in job recruitment, hiring, promotions, training or pay, "one of the biggest areas we're still trying to address is getting qualified disabled people jobs," Heumann said.

She recently attended an event where the National Security Agency (NSA), a component of the U.S. intelligence community, was honored for its record of hiring people with disabilities.

"Here was a government agency that had people in senior- to mid-level management positions who had the responsibility to recruit, hire and ensure that appropriate accommodations were made for the [disabled] employee," Heumann said. The most important factor was NSA's attitude, she said. "When qualified people came to them, they looked at the qualifications and they didn't give reasons why not — they said, 'Yes we can, and how do we do it?'"

When Heumann was an assistant secretary of education

in the 1990s in the administration of President Bill Clinton, she was assisted by a young blind man who said he had recently graduated from Stanford University. "I asked him where he's working. And he wasn't working," she recalled. "He said he got job interviews, but when people saw that he was blind, he wasn't getting jobs. I think that's still a common story today."

Although high schools and universities are more accessible than ever before, Heumann said, "The dropout rates [for disabled students] are still too high."

As disabled people become integrated members of the community, she said, "the stigma of disability slowly disappears — but I think it's fair to say that there really is a heavy stigma associated with disability. I think people really don't know how they would adjust [to being disabled], and I think that's one of the barriers that exists."

"We have a lot to celebrate with the 20th anniversary of the ADA, and a lot more to do to insure its compliance," Heumann said.

#### EVERYBODY BENEFITS

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that there are more than 54 million people in the United States living with disabilities, and the United Nations — which adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 — projects that some 650 million people throughout the world are disabled. They are the world's largest minority. Eighty percent live in developing countries.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has said that "discrimination against people with disabilities isn't only an injustice, it is a strain on economic development, a limit to democracy, a burden on families and a cause of social erosion."

In the United States, said Heumann, "the removal of barriers has enabled disabled people to become a growing part of mainstream society." And like any other group, "if disabled people are working, we have disposable income. It's going to restaurants, travelling — doing what other people do."

Before joining the State Department, Heumann served as the World Bank's first adviser on disability and development. It strengthened her belief that the disabled population is a huge untapped asset all over the world.

"When you have more than 650 million disabled people in the world, many of whom are being denied opportunities based on discrimination," she said, "we can see that if we remove barriers and provide equal opportunities, it will help improve the economies of



countries around the world.”

The U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities elaborates in detail the rights of disabled persons and commits countries to ensuring those rights. The United States signed the convention in 2009; preparations are under way to present it to the U.S. Senate for ratification in 2011, according to Heumann.

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